

Now, so long as you are under my guard, I shall not let you go; you may be sure of that; I would rather wring your necks like two pigeons. But the epaulette once off, I know no longer admiral nor anything else."

"The fact is," he answered, mournfully shaking his brown head, though a little powdered, as was still the fashion of that day,—"the fact is, I think it would be dangerous for you, captain, to seem to know us. We laugh because we are young; we look happy because we love one another; but I have many a miserable moment when I think of the future, and I know not what will become of my poor Laura." And he again pressed the head of his young wife to his bosom.

"That was what I ought to say to the captain," added he, "was it not, my child? You would have said the same thing, wouldn't you?"

"I took my pipe, and rose, because I felt that my eyes were becoming somewhat moist, and that doesn't become me very well."

"Come, come," said I, "this will all clear up by and by; if the smoke of my pipe incommodes Madame, she must go away."

"She raised her face all scarlet and wet with tears, like a child which has been scolded."

"Besides," said she, looking at my clock, "you forget that there—the letter?"

"I felt something that struck home to me at these words—something like a sudden pain at the roots of my hair as she spoke."

"Pardieu! I did not think of that," said I. "This is a pretty piece of business to be sure. If we had only crossed the first degree of north latitude, nothing would be left for me but to jump overboard. Can't I get tolerably happy, but this child here must remind me of that big scamp of a letter!"

"I looked quickly at my sea-chart, and when I saw that we had yet a week to sail, my head was relieved, but not my heart—I knew not why."

"It's no joking matter with the Directory about the article obedience," said I.—"Well I am all straight this time. Time has passed so quickly, that I had completely forgotten that."

"Well, sir, there we remained, all three of us, with our noses in the air, looking up at that letter, as if it could speak. What struck me forcibly was, that the sun, as it shown through the bull's-eye, fell upon the glass of the clock, and lighting the spot, made the great red seal and the other small ones appear like the features of a face in the midst of fire."

"Wouldn't one say its eyes were coming out of its head!" said I to amuse them."

"Oh! dearest," said the girl shuddering, "they look like spots of blood!"

"Nonsense," said her husband, taking her in his arms, "you deceive yourself, Laura; it looks like a wedding invitation. Come and rest yourself—come! Why do you trouble yourself about that letter?"

"They hurried off as if a ghost were after them, and went on deck."

"I remained alone with the big letter, and I remember that, as I smoked my pipe, I kept my gaze fixed upon it as if had riveted my eyes by meeting them, like those of a snake. Its great pale face—that third seal, larger than the eyes—open, ravenous, like the jaws of a wolf—all that put me in a very bad humor. I took my coat and hung it over the clock, that I might see neither the hour nor that d— of a letter."

"I went to finish my pipe on deck, and remained there till night. We were then about on a line with the Cape de Verd Islands. The *Marat* cut through the water, wind astern, over ten knots with ease. The night was the most beautiful one I have ever seen near the tropic. The moon was just rising at the horizon, large as a sun; the sea divided it in the middle, and became all white like a field of snow covered over with little diamonds. I looked at it from the bench where I sat smoking. The officer of the watch and the sailors did not speak; and, like me were looking at the shadow of the brig on the water. I was glad to hear nothing; I like silence and order. I had forbidden all noise and all fires. Nevertheless, I perceived a small red streak almost under my feet. I should immediately have put myself in a passion, but as it came from the cabin of my little convicts, I wished to satisfy myself what they were about before I got angry. I had only to lean over and I could see through the sky-light of the little cabin, and I looked down. The young girl was on her knees at her prayers. There was a little lamp which cast its light upon her. She was in her night-dress, and I saw from above her bare shoulders, her little naked feet, and her long fair hair all afloat. I thought I would retire; but nonsense! said I to myself—an old soldier like me, what harm is there?—and so I remained."

"Her husband was seated on a small trunk, his head in his hands, watching her as she prayed. She raised her face as though to Heaven, and I saw her large blue eyes

wet like those of a Magdalen. Whilst she was praying he took the ends of her long hair and kissed them without disturbing her. When she had finished she made the sign of the cross, smiling as though she was just going to Paradise. I saw him also make the sign of the cross after her but as if he were ashamed of it. And, indeed, for a man, such a thing is a little singular."

"She rose, kissed him, and stretched herself first in the hammock, where he threw her in as they put to bed a child in a cradle. The heat was stifling, and she seemed to find pleasure in the rocking motion of the vessel. Her tiny white feet were crossed and raised to the level of her head, and her whole person wrapped in her long white dress. Oh! she was a perfect little love!"

"Dearest," said she, "already half asleep, are you not sleepy? Do you know it is very late?"

"He remained still with his head in his hand without answering. This made her a little anxious, the sweet child, and she raised her pretty head out of the hammock, like a bird out of its nest, and looked at him with her lips parted, not venturing to speak again."

"At last he said: 'Oh! dear Laura! the nearer we approach to America, I cannot help it, but so much the sadder I become.—I know not why it is, but I feel as if this voyage will have been the happiest part of our life.'"

"And so it seems to me," said she, "and I wish we might never arrive."

"He looked at her, pressing his hands together with an expression of feeling you cannot imagine."

"And yet, my angel, you always weep when you pray to God," said he, "and that distresses me sadly, for I well know whom you are thinking of, and I fear you are sorry for what you have done."

"I sorry!" said she with a look of much pain—"I sorry to have followed you, dearest! Do you think that because I had been yours but so short a time, I loved you the less? Is one not a woman, and does one not know one's duty, at seventeen? My mother and my sisters, did they not say that it was my duty to follow you to Guiana?—Did they not say I was doing nothing wonderful? I am only surprised that you should have been so touched by it, and I do not know how you can imagine that I regret anything, when I am with you, to help you to live, or to die if you die."

"She said all this with so sweet a voice, one would have thought it was music. I was a good deal moved by it, and said to myself—'Good little wife—yes indeed!'"

"The young man sighed with grief as he stamped on the floor with his foot, and kissed a pretty little hand and bare arm which she extended to him."

"Oh! Laurette, my own Laurette!" said he, "when I think that if we had only delayed our marriage for a few days, I should have been seized alone, and sent off alone, I cannot forgive myself."

"Then the beautiful girl stretched her beautiful white arms, bare to the shoulders, out of the hammock, and caressed his brow, his hair, his eyes, taking his head between her hands as though to carry it away and hide it in her bosom. She smiled like a child, and said a thousand sweet little womanly things, such as I, for my part, had never heard any thing of the kind before.—She shut her mouth playfully with her fingers, so as to have all the speaking to herself, and wiping his eyes with her long hair, as with a handkerchief, she said: 'And is it not a great deal better to have a wife with you who loves you—say, dearest? I am perfectly content to go to Cayenne; I shall see savages and cocoa-nut trees, like those of *Paul and Virginia*, shan't I? We will each plant our own. We shall see who will be the best gardener. And we will make a little hut for us two. I will work all day and all night, if you wish. I am strong; see—look at my arms; see, I could almost lift you. And besides I am excellent in embroidery, and is there not some city thereabouts where embroideries are wanted?—and then I will give lessons in music and drawing, if they choose; and if they know how to read there, you can write you know.'"

"I remember that the poor fellow was in such despair that a loud cry escaped him as she spoke thus. 'To write!' he exclaimed, 'to write!' and he seized his right hand with his left, pressing it tightly at the wrist. 'Ah! to write! Why have I ever known how to write? To write! it is the trade of fools. I believed in their liberty of the press—where were my senses? And, to do what? To print five or six poor ideas, commonplace enough, read only by those who like them, and thrown into the fire by those who hate them, serving no other end but to bring persecution upon us. As for me, it is of but little consequence; but you, beautiful angel, scarcely four days a wife, what had you done? Tell me, tell me, I entreat of you,

how I came to let you carry your goodness so far as to follow me here? Do you know where you are, poor girl! and whither you are going? You will soon, my child, be sixteen hundred leagues away from your mother and sisters. And for me!—all this for me!"

"She hid her head for a moment in the hammock, and I from above could see that she was weeping; but he from below did not perceive it, and when she uncovered her face it was already brightened by a smile, to enliven and cheer him."

"In truth we are not very rich just now," said she, "bursting into a laugh; see, here is my purse, I have only one single louis.—And you."

"He began also to laugh like a child:—'Faith I had a crown left, but I gave it to the little boy who carried your trunk.'"

"Oh, well! what difference does that make?" said she, snapping her little white fingers like castanets; "people are never so merry as when they have nothing; and besides, have I not in reserve the two diamond rings that my mother gave me? Those are good every where, and for every thing, are they not? Whenever you choose we will sell them. And besides, I am sure that that dear old soul, the captain, does not tell us all his good intentions for us, and that he knows what is in the letter. I am sure it is a recommendation for us to the Governor of Cayenne."

"Perhaps so," said he, "who knows?"

"And then," added his little wife, "you are so good that I am sure the government has only exiled you for a short time, but has no thought of harm against you."

"She had said that so sweetly, when she called me 'that dear old soul the captain,' that I was quite touched and melted, and I rejoiced in my very heart that she had perhaps guessed truly. They began anew to embrace one another; and I stamped loudly on the deck to make them stop."

"Eh! how now, my little friends! I cried, 'the order is to put out all the lights on board the ship; blow out your lamp if you please.'"

"They obeyed, and I heard them talking and laughing below, in the dark, like school-children. I, for my part, relit my pipe and walked the deck by myself. All the tropical stars were at their posts, large as little moons. I watched them, and breathed an air which seemed fresh and sweet. I said to myself that the good little folks had certainly guessed the truth, and my spirits mounted at the thought. I would have wagered anything that one of the five Directors had changed his mind, and recommended them to my care. I did not very well explain to myself the how or the why of the matter, because they are affairs of state which I for my part never understood; but I fully believed it, and without knowing why, I was made happy by it."

"I took my little night lantern and went to look at the letter under my old uniform. It had altogether a different air now; it seemed to smile, and the seals to be the color of roses. I had no longer any suspicion of its good intentions, and gave it a little nod of friendship."

"However, notwithstanding all that, I hung my old coat over it; I was tired of it. We thought no more of looking at it for some days, and we were very merry. But as we approached the first degree of latitude, we began to leave off talking."

"One fine morning I awoke, surprised enough to feel no motion of the ship. The fact is, I sleep with only one eye shut, as they say, and as I missed the tossing, I opened them both. We had got into a dead calm, and it was under the first degree of north latitude, and the twentieth of longitude. I put my head on deck; the sea was as smooth as if it were of oil, and the open sails hung down glued to the masts, like empty balloons. I immediately said to myself, as I gave a sidelong glance at the letter—'Very well, I shall have plenty of time to read you,' and waited till the evening, till sunset. But it had to be done sooner or later, so I uncovered the clock, and drew from under it the sealed order. Well, sir, I held it in my hand for a quarter of an hour, without being able to open it. At last I said, *this is too bad!*—and broke the three seals with one movement of my thumb, and as for the big red seal, I ground it to powder. When I had read it, I rubbed my eyes, thinking they must have deceived me."

"I read the letter over again from the beginning to the end; I read it through; I read it all over again and again. I began again at the last line and went up to the first; I could not believe it. My legs shook a little under me; I felt a peculiar quivering of the skin of my face, and I rubbed my cheeks with rum, and put some in the hollow of my hands. I was really ashamed of myself for being such a child—but it was only the affair of a moment. I went on deck to take a little air."

"Laurette was that day so pretty, that I would not go near her. She had on a little simple white dress, her arms bare to the neck, and her long hair flowing, as she always wore it. She was amusing herself with dipping her other dress into the sea, from the end of a cord, and laughed to see that the ocean was as tranquil and pure as a spring of which she could see the bottom."

"Come and see the sand! come quick!" she cried, and her husband leaned upon her and bent over, but did not look at the water, for he was looking at her with a touching air of tenderness. I made a sign to the young man to come to speak to me on the quarter-deck. She turned round,—I don't know how I looked, but she let her rope drop, and grasped him convulsively by the arm, saying: 'Oh don't go! he is so pale!' That might well be; it was enough to make one turn pale. Still he came toward me on the quarter-deck. She stood leaning against the main-mast, following us with her eyes, as we walked up and down without a word. I lit a cigar, which I found bitter, and spit it out into the water. He watched my eye; I took him by the arm—I was choking—upon my word I was choking."

"Come, come, now," said I at length, "my little friend, tell me something of your history. What the— have you done to those five honnds of lawyers, who are there like five pieces of a king? They seem to owe you a heavy grudge. It's very queer." "He shrugged his shoulders, bending his head down—with such a sweet smile, poor boy!—and said:

"Oh! captain, nothing much, depend upon it. Three satirical verses upon the Directory, that is all."

"It isn't possible!" said I.

"Oh, yes, indeed! and the verses were not even very good ones. I was arrested the 15th of Fructidor, and taken to La Force; tried on the 16th, and sentenced first to death, then, through clemency, to transportation."

"That's queer," said I, "these Directors must be very susceptible fellows, for that letter you know of, orders me to shoot you."

"He did not answer, and smiled with a manly face enough for a boy of nineteen.—He only looked at his wife, and wiped his forehead, on which stood big drops of sweat; I had as many on my face too; and others in my eyes. I continued:

"It seems those citizens did not wish to do your business on shore; they thought that at sea it would not be so much noticed. But it's very hard for me! It's all of no use that you are such a fine fellow, I can't escape from it; the sentence of death is there complete, and the order for the execution signed and sealed; there's nothing omitted."

"He bowed very politely, though his face was crimsoned, and said, with a voice as sweet as usual: 'I ask for nothing, captain; I should be grieved to make you fail in your duty. I should only like to speak a moment to Laurette; and to entreat you to protect her, in case she should survive me,—which I do not think she will.'"

"Ah! as for that, it is but right, my boy; and, if you have no objection, I will take her to her own family, on my return to France, and only leave her when she wishes to see me no more. But it strikes me you need not fear that she will recover from this blow—poor little soul!"

"He took my two hands, pressed them, and said—

"My dear captain, you suffer more than I do, from what yet remains to be done. I feel it indeed, but it cannot be helped. I rely upon you to preserve for her, the little that belongs to me, to watch over her, and see that she receives whatever her aged mother may leave her, will you not? to guard her life, her honor; and that her health is always well taken care of, will you not? You see," he added, in a lower voice, "I must tell you that she is very delicate, and often so much troubled by her breast, as to faint several times a day. She must always keep herself well covered. In a word, you will take the place, as much as possible, of her father, her mother, and me, will you not? I should be glad if she could keep the rings her mother gave her. But, if it is necessary that they should be sold for her, be it so. My poor Laurette!—see how beautiful she is!"

"As this began to be a little too tender, I became tired of it, and set to knitting my brows. I had spoken cheerfully to him so as not to weaken him, but I could stand it no longer. 'Enough,' said I, 'we understand each other. Go and speak to her, and let us make haste.'"

"I pressed his hand as a friend, and as he did not let it go, but kept looking at me with a singular expression, I added: 'I'll tell you what it is, if I had any advice to give you, it would be to say nothing to her about that matter. We will arrange the thing without her expecting it, nor you either; make yourself easy—that's my affair.'"